THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED WOMAN
IN THE WORLD

Dale Carnegie

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THE MOST *Accomplished Woman* IN THE WORLD...

BY DALE CARNEGIE

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WHO would you say was the most astonishing, most incredible woman who ever lived? Joan of Arc? Madame Curie? Perhaps. But my own choice for the woman whose accomplishments are more astounding than those of any other who ever lived is a sixty-five-year-old woman who lives in Weston, Conn.

Her name is Helen Keller. Totally deaf and blind, she has nonetheless managed to make herself famous, highly respected and warmly beloved.

Born perfectly normal, Helen Keller could see and hear like other children until suddenly at nineteen months she was struck down by an illness which left her deaf and blind. Although her vocal chords were undamaged, she could not learn to speak because she couldn't hear other human voices.

As she grew older, because of her lonely existence, her parents could not bring themselves to punish or correct her. So her growth was wild, untamed, more like that of an animal than a civilized child.

Then Mrs. Keller learned of a deaf and blind child who had been taught to read and write at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston. She wrote to the Institution, begged for a teacher to look after Helen—and Anne Sullivan came. An orphan brought up in a Massachusetts poorhouse, Anne herself had almost become blind when she was fourteen years old. It was then that she learned to read with her fingers and acquired her great love and sympathy for the blind.

Within one short month, she succeeded in communicating with Helen in the world of darkness and silence in which she lived and managed to transmit to her the knowledge that there was speech.

It happened one day when Anne Sullivan took the little girl to the wellhouse. As the cool spring water gushed from the pump, Anne held the child's hand under the spout and, in her palm, spelled over and over the deaf-and-dumb symbols for "water." At first Helen thought it was a game. Then suddenly, she stiffened, her whole body growing tense with realization. Casting about for other things, she touched the ground, the pump, the trellis and, as she was given each new name, spelled it out with her own fingers.

Because it opened a new exciting world, the discovery that there were such things as words, that every object had a name and that people could communicate with each other was probably the most thrilling event in Helen Keller's life. By the end of the day, this child, who that morning had not known anything but instinctive and emotional action, mastered thirty words. "At the close of that eventful day," she said later, "I lived over the joys it had brought and, for the first time in my life, I longed for a new day to come."

But that was only the start. When she was eleven, Helen Keller heard of a deaf and blind girl who had been taught to speak and decided that she too would learn. Although an expert in vocal instruction warned her that the process would be long and difficult, perhaps even impossible, Helen was not to be swayed. She *would* learn to talk.

Learn to talk she did and years later she appeared on the lecture platform, in vaudeville and even in a motion picture.

Convinced now that nothing was impossible, Helen tackled foreign languages and learned to read, in addition to English, French, German, Italian, Latin and Greek. At twenty she entered Radcliffe College and studied her Braille textbooks until her finger-tips bled, but she took her A.B. degree in 1900.

For nearly fifty years Anne Sullivan moved, like a guardian angel, at Helen Keller's side, acting as her eyes and ears. She was," Helen Keller said, "like another self." Then an ironic fate decreed that Anne Sullivan's normally weak eyes should fail completely and teacher and student changed places. It was Helen's turn now, to read to her teacher—literally a case of the blind leading the blind. And so it was until the day Anne Sullivan died.

Now Helen Keller has another companion, but it hardly seems she needs one. More than most women, Miss Keller seems completely self-relient. Although her sense of direction is not unusually highly developed (she often loses her way—even in her own home) her sense of smell is so acute that she can tell where she is by the odors around her. Fifth Avenue, New York, has what she calls an "aristocratic smell."

Her sense of touch also is extremely keen. If she were to shake hands with you today and meet you again in five years, Miss Keller would remember you by your handshake; what's more she could tell whether you were angry or happy, disappointed or gay. She "listens" to the radio by feeling the vibrations of the cabinet and enjoys violin and piano music by putting her hands on the wood part of the instrument. If she wants to know what you're saying, all she has to do is place her fingers lightly on your lips and then she's ready to answer. But when Helen Keller gets angry, she doesn't storm or rant or throw things; she just closes both her hands tightly. That way no one can communicate with her by touching the palm of her hand.

A few years ago, when Miss Keller lived near me, I used to see her strolling in her garden with her big shepherd dog. I noticed then that she talked to herself as she walked. But she didn't move her lips, as you and I would—she moved her fingers and talked to herself in sign language.

The one thing that she regrets most, Miss Keller says occasionally in a wistful voice, is that she can't hear. Being blind is not so bad, but being deaf is really a hardship. In the complete darkness and silence which separate this remarkable woman from the rest of the world, the thing she misses most is the friendly sound of a human voice. However, the times when she remarks even on this are few. Helen Keller is not given to self-pity.

She has done a lot in life, more than most people. She learned to swim, dance, row a boat and gallop through the woods on horseback. She plays checkers and chess, even solitaire. She knits, crochets and reads incessantly. And she has written nine books.

Now, at sixty-six, when most people think of retiring, Helen Keller traipses around the country, visiting veterans' hospitals because she realizes that, more than anyone else in the world, she is in a position to bring hope and encouragement to these disabled boys. When they understand what she, with all her handicaps, has done, they are moved to plan and undertake big things for themselves. And she regards her work among the handicapped as the climax of her life.

Recently, a boy in a hospital ward, caught up in Miss Keller's story of her experiences, let his dinner get cold. When told he ought to eat, he retorted: "Hell, lady, I can eat any time. But there's only one Helen Keller."

And that's how most people feel about her. But not Helen Keller. When asked how she felt about her lot in life, she replied: "I think God is using me for some good purpose that I shall understand in His own good time; so I am content."

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